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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI/ERITREA: MFA SAYS NOT TO
INTERNATIONALIZE BORDER INCURSION

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 427
[1](#)B. DJIBOUTI 428

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor William Jordan, 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) MFA AF/E DAS-equivalent Helene Le Gal said on May 2 that the French were not in favor of Djibouti's bringing Eritrea's recent border incursion (reftels) before the African Union, Arab League, or UN Security Council, despite the fact that the Arab League is going to discuss the matter on May 4. She said that doing so would only create tensions over an issue that had already been resolved, de facto, by Eritrea's withdrawal from Djiboutian territory. Le Gal confirmed that France had been supplying air reconnaissance imagery to Djibouti, and that this imagery originally showed a slight but definite incursion by Eritrean forces into Djibouti. The Eritreans used earth-moving equipment to dig a trench in Djiboutian territory. However, subsequent imagery, "which is very precise," showed that the Eritreans had withdrawn.

[1](#)2. (C) Le Gal added that Eritrean military units remained near the border, confronted by some 1,000 Djiboutian troops (two-thirds of all of Djibouti's military, Le Gal said). In these circumstances, which could well indicate that the Eritreans had mistakenly advanced into Djiboutian territory, Djibouti would have little to gain by raising this incursion at an international level. Le Gal observed that Eritrea, already plagued with border issues with Ethiopia and UNMEE, could raise tensions quickly should Djibouti take further action. Le Gal said that the two sides should discuss this calmly and consider delineating the border more effectively to prevent similar incidents. France, as former colonial power, was willing to supply detailed maps of the border areas to assist in this effort. She noted that neither side had expressed doubt about the accuracy of the Eritrea-Djibouti boundary, notwithstanding the unresolved Ethiopia-Eritrea frontier. Le Gal agreed with ref A assessment that it would be difficult for Djibouti financially and logistically to sustain the deployment of so many of its troops along the border for any length of time.

[1](#)3. (C) Le Gal said that, given the May 4 Arab League discussion of the issue, we should wait to see what, if anything, emerges from those talks before considering other courses of action.

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